

## Notes on *Epthianura lovensis* (Ashby).

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THIS most interesting addition to the desert avifauna of Australia was described by Mr. Edwin Ashby in *The Emu*, vol. x., p. 251 (1911), under the above name, with the proviso—"It may, after further investigation, exhibit generic differences."

In the *Agric. Gazette, New South Wales*, vol. xxii., p. 211 (1911), Mr. A. J. North therefore introduced for it the genus name *Ashbyia*. The same author, in the *Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W.*, 1911 (26th April, Abst., p. 11), amplified the diagnosis of the genus, and noted:—"The genus *Ashbyia* is allied to *Epthianura*, but the latter may be distinguished by its more slender and pointed bill, its shorter wing and different wing formula, and by its longer upper tail coverts."

The type specimens are now before me, and I would accept their very close relationship with the genus *Epthianura* as broadly understood, and in my "Reference-List" I included them in that genus.

As Mr. Ashby indicated, its nearest ally would seem to be *E. crocea*, from which it is easily distinguished by the characters Mr. Ashby points out.

A careful examination of the *Epthianura* in connection with this species reveals a few matters of interest. The type of *Epthianura* (Gould) is the *Acanthiza albifrons* of Jardine and Selby. Though the males of *E. albifrons* (Jard. and Selby) and *E. tricolor* (Gould) are quite unlike in colouration, they have dull-coloured females which somewhat resemble each other, the red rump of the latter being the most noticeable feature. From both of these species the male of *E. aurifrons* (Gould) absolutely differs in its colouration; but here again the dull female is not so very dissimilar, the red rump being replaced by a yellow one, while a yellowish-green wash pervades the lower surface.

*E. crocea* (Castelnau and Ramsay) recalls the preceding species in the style of colouration of the male, while the female is not so markedly different, the yellow rump being present, while on the under surface the yellow is mainly restricted to the flanks, lower abdomen, and under tail coverts, where, however, it is not so noticeable as in the preceding species.

The present species would be referable to this group by its colouration, though it is easily characterized by its superior size and heavy bill. In its upper colouration it lacks the yellow rump, and it has the under surface more distinctly greenish-yellow throughout, this colour reappearing on the lores and on the supercilious eye-streak, though a buff tinge washes the sides of the breast.

There seems to me to be only two courses open in the treatment of these birds—either the inclusion of the whole of the species in the genus *Epthianura*, or else the recognition of four genera. In my "Reference-List" I adopted the former course,

but my recent monographic studies have convinced me that such was the incorrect policy. The entirely different colouration of the males has more significance than the apparent similarity of the so-called structural characters, and it is necessary to judge all species upon the combined value of both colouration and structure, and I am therefore employing both in my acceptance of generic names for Australian birds for the future.

If we examine the colouration of these birds we have three different styles—the first, *E. albifrons* (Jard. and Selby); the second, *E. tricolor* (Gould); and the third, *E. aurifrons* (Gould). *E. crocea* (Castelnau and Ramsay), and *E. lovensis* (Ashby). When these groups are examined for structural differences it is seen that such exist, and, moreover, that the last three, which somewhat agree in colouration, also have their structural features more closely resembling. *E. tricolor* (Gould) has its bill longer and more slender than in *E. albifrons*, while it has shorter claws, and, though the wing is as long, the first primary is appreciably shorter. The other three have all more curved bills and shorter, more rounded wings, with comparatively longer first primaries, and more slender legs. In this group again *E. lovensis* (Ashby) can be differentiated by its larger size, heavy bill, &c., as characterized by Mr. North. I am therefore proposing to use the following generic names for these birds:—

*Epthianura* (Gould) for *E. albifrons* (Jard. and Selby).

*Parepthianura* (nov.) for *E. tricolor* (Gould).

*Aurepthianura* (nov.) for *E. aurifrons* (Gould) and *E. crocea* (Castelnau and Ramsay).

*Ashbyia* (North) for *E. lovensis* (Ashby).

There is a lot of work to be done in connection with this group, as in the "Hand-list Birds Brit. Museum" they are constituted a sub-family of the family *Turdidæ*, while North, when introducing *Ashbyia*, placed it in the family *Timeliidæ*—"the ornithologist's waste-paper basket." In the vernacular they are called "Chats," but their systematic position cannot be considered settled.

A note of explanation is necessary in connection with the accompanying plate. Through the death of the colourist engaged upon the plates it became necessary to employ another worker, and in consequence they all appear darker than the originals. This, however, may not be a fault, because the female, as Mr. Ashby noted, is moulting, and the new feathers are coming darker than the old ones. As the male was killed a month earlier, it is still in its old worn and faded plumage. It may, therefore, be that the plate will approximate somewhat more closely to the new plumage of this species than it does to the type specimens.

Mr. Ashby, South Australia, obligingly supplies some field observations concerning the new bird:—

"I am indebted to my friend, Mr. J. R. B. Love, for the information contained in the following notes:—

"*Occurrence*.—The first specimen seen was an isolated male, in the last week of October or the first week in November, 1910, in the neighbourhood of Leigh's Creek, South Australia. A flock of about 20 was seen later in November, and later on, in December and early January, between Hergott Springs and the River Cooper, several pairs were seen throughout the 90-mile journey, running on the ground or occasionally flitting across the track—in all, perhaps 20.

"*Nature of Country*.—The ground is dull red, covered thickly with stones the size of a marble to that of a plum, with salt-bush or blue-bush, say 3 or 4 feet apart. In the stretch between Hergott Springs and Cooper's Creek the country is typical "gibber plain," and the stones are more rounded and set closer together than near Leigh's Creek.

"*Habits*.—The habit of this bird separates it at once from any of the genus *Ephthianura* with which I am acquainted. It is always seen in the open country—either 'gibber plain' or open, stony hillside—running on the ground, bobbing its tail up and down in the same manner as the Australian Pipit (*Anthus australis*). So closely do its actions resemble that bird that at first I thought it possible that the tail was not fully developed, for it seemed strangely short for a bird that so closely resembled the Pipit in its actions. I have never seen a Wheat-ear, but from the written descriptions of the habits of some of the species occurring in Africa one would expect some relationship between them and the species under review. On one occasion a small boy saw one of these birds run into a rabbit-burrow, and, the burrow being short, he caught the bird in his hand, and took it home and fed it on Canary seed, which it ate, but after two days died, and, unfortunately, was thrown away. One of the specimens shot likewise ran down a rabbit-burrow after being hit, which suggests that this habit may be common to the species.

"*In Conclusion*.—The last time this bird was met with was Easter, 1911, near Leigh's Creek, when a single bird was seen. The prevalence of drought conditions since that date has prevented its recurrence in that locality.

"An observant bushman described the nest as being very similar in situation and structure to that of the Pipit (*Anthus australis*)."

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## Notes and Notices.

**Osprey (Egret) Plumes.**—The Duchess of Portland, writing to *The Times*, 23rd August, states:—"My attention having been called to the fact that mounts of real osprey were recently advertised for sale, I beg that you will allow me through your column to implore my countrywomen to refrain from purchasing this particular kind of head-dress. I am afraid ladies are not generally aware of the dreadful suffering caused in procuring these feathers. The milliner's osprey (French, *aigrette*) grows on the back of the White Heron or Egret, and then only in the breeding season, when their nests are congregated together in large numbers. Thus, the birds, although alarmed on the approach of the hunters, are unwilling to leave their offspring, and fall an easy prey to the guns, after which the coveted feathers are plucked from their